Richard Kleindienst, left, deputy attorney general, is seen succeeding Attorney General John Mitchell.

Kleindienst Eyed If Mitchell Quits

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White House assistant John D. Ehrlichman yesterday removed his name from consideration as a possible successor to Attorney General John N. Mitchell.

Ehrlichman's announcement—made through fellow White House aide Robert H. Finch—increases the likelihood that Deputy Attorney General Richard G. Kleindienst will move up to head the Justice Department if Mitchell, as expected, resigns to direct President Nixon's re-election campaign.

Mitchell has said repeatedly that he has not been asked by the President to resume his 1968 role as campaign manager, and he reiterated yesterday that "I have no intention of resigning."

But his close associates in the administration and the Republican Party universally believe he will do just that, at Mr. Nixon's request, next fall or winter.

As a result, speculation on his successor has increased in recent weeks, with Ehrlichman's name among those prominently mentioned.

Finch surprised a group of newsmen by pushing away from the table after a breakfast question-and-answer session yesterday and announcing he had "one piece of hard news" to deliver before he left.

"Ehrlichman's not going to be attorney general," he said. Finch added that "you can draw your own conclusions" about who would take over at Justice.

Later, it was learned that Ehrlichman had asked Finch before the breakfast to knock down speculation about his succeeding Mitchell.

Ehrlichman is a Seattle lawyer and Nixon campaign aide who served as counsel to the President before taking over his present duties as assistant for domestic affairs.

Kleindienst, a 48-year-old Arizona native and Harvard Law School graduate, was active in the presidential campaigns of both Sen. Barry Goldwater (R-Ariz.) and Mr. Nixon. He has served as Mitchell's deputy since the start of the Nixon administration.

According to Justice Department sources, Kleindienst has indicated an interest in succeeding Mitchell, but feels that whoever inherits the post should be free to pick his own deputy.

Associates take that to mean that he would not remain in the department if Mr. Nixon should choose someone else as attorney general.

His own choice as a deputy is thought likely to be either Robert Mardian, the assistant attorney general who heads the internal security division, or William H. Rehnquist, now assistant attorney general in charge of the office of legal counsel.

Finch, who said he "keeps a hand in "politics as a counselor to the President. told newsmen that no firm plans have yet been made about next spring's presidential primaries.

He said the White House "would not ignore" the possible challenge from antiwar Rep. Paul N. (Pete) McCloskey Jr. (R-Calif.), but Finch said he is "very much inclined to doubt" the President would campaign actively in the primaries, even if McCloskey runs.

Finch noted that state laws would probably require that Mr. Nixon's name appear on the ballot in half-a-dozen primaries, and said that "it might be in our interests" to have favorite sons represent the President in others.

But he emphatically denied that Sen. Robert Taft's announcement last week of his favorite-son candidacy in the Ohio primary was part of a pattern.